

Summary report on the

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**Meeting of the Regional
Verification Commission
(RVC) for hepatitis B
control in the Eastern
Mediterranean Region**

Amman, Jordan
11–12 June 2019



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held the first meeting of the newly-established Regional Verification Commission (RVC) for hepatitis B control in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in Amman, Jordan on 11–12 June 2019.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- review and endorse the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the RVC; and
- review and endorse the regional guidelines for verification of achieving the hepatitis B control target in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The meeting was attended by seven out of the nine members of the RVC. One member joined a session virtually on the second day. Two members who could not attend the meeting, sent their feedback and inputs on the draft guidelines and SOPs of the RVC in writing through email to the WHO Secretariat. WHO staff from the Regional Office also attended the meeting.

Dr Nadia Teleb, Regional Adviser for Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and Immunization, welcomed members of the RVC on behalf of Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, thanking them for their willingness to serve on the Commission, and emphasizing the importance of the work of the Commission in verifying achievement of an important regional immunization target.

Dr Hyam Bashour, Professor of Community Medicine, Damascus University, Syrian Arab Republic, who moderated the meeting, thanked WHO and the members of the RVC for their support for verification of the hepatitis B control target in the Region and underlined the crucial role

the RVC would play in achieving the regional target. Dr Salah Al Awaidy, Advisor to the Ministry of Health, Oman, and Dr Bashour were selected by the RVC members as the co-chairpersons of the Commission.

2. Summary of discussions

Overview on immunization and hepatitis B vaccination in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

A presentation was made on the situation of immunization in the Region and progress towards achieving regional goals.

Overview of the regional action plan for the implementation of the global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis 2017–2021

The epidemiology of viral hepatitis in the Region was presented, along with the salient features of the global health sector strategy and regional action plan for viral hepatitis, and baseline estimates and targets for indicators.

Not all countries have fully implemented hepatitis B control strategies. Five countries have yet to introduce the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine and eight countries have yet to reach the 90% benchmark for hepatitis third dose vaccination coverage.

At present, there is no dedicated regional body (task force or working group) to oversee progress on hepatitis-specific global and regional targets. However, countries with a high disease burden in the Region have hepatitis technical advisory groups to guide national hepatitis control programmes.

Commission members observed that the regional action plan for the implementation of the global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis 2017–2021 does not incorporate the regional hepatitis B control target as a target/goal. This sends a confusing message to countries about the specific goals for hepatitis B and viral hepatitis set by different units within the WHO Regional Office.

Commission members highlighted the importance of the control target as a milestone in moving towards the elimination target by 2030. Commission members enquired about the next steps after verification of the achievement of the hepatitis B control target. This might help in providing direction to countries towards the subsequent target set for 2030.

Regional verification of hepatitis B control: Experience and lessons learnt from other regions

A presentation was given on the different regional targets and their verification processes. There was discussion on the experiences and lessons learnt in other WHO regions that the RVC can benefit from.

Reviewing and endorsing the SOPs of the RVC

Members of the RVC reviewed the SOPs of the RVC. The agreed changes were incorporated by the Secretariat. The Secretariat shared the revised SOPs with the RVC members for further input and the revised SOPs were then endorsed by the RVC.

Templates for the regional guide, country report and reviewer's report for verification of achievement of the hepatitis B control target

The RVC reviewed the regional guide for verification of achievement of the hepatitis B control target, the reporting template that countries need to submit to document the verification of achievement of the hepatitis B control target and the RVC reviewer's report for evaluating the country verification report. All suggested changes and amendments were noted by the Secretariat for further amendment of the documents. Timelines for different steps in the verification process were discussed and finalized by members. The timelines will be included in the guidelines.

3. Next steps

- The WHO immunization and hepatitis control programmes need to work together at regional and global levels to harmonize the different hepatitis B targets (control and elimination) set by individual programmes to provide a clear directive to Member States. Both programmes need to align strategies to complement each other for the achievement of the regional control and global elimination goals of hepatitis.
- The Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and Immunization and Hepatitis, AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases units of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean will work together to include the hepatitis B control goal as a key milestone in achieving the global elimination goal by 2030.
- A meeting report, together with the revised verification guide and templates, will be shared by the Secretariat with RVC members within two weeks.
- The next meeting of the RVC will be held during the second quarter of 2020.

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